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Core Principles For A Free Iraq

By Donald H. Rumsfeld

WASHINGTON -- I recently returned from Baghdad, where I had the opportunity to meet with the troops who liberated Iraq. Notwithstanding death squads and dust storms, they crossed hundreds of miles to reach the gates of Baghdad in less than two weeks, toppling Saddam Hussein's regime in less than a month -- a remarkable achievement.

But just as remarkable as what they accomplished are all the things that did not happen. Because of the speed of the execution of the war plan, the regime did not attack its neighbors with SCUD missiles; the vast majority of Iraq's oil fields were not destroyed and an environmental disaster was averted; key bridges, roads and rail lines were secured; dams were not broken; villages were not flooded; the infrastructure of the country is largely intact; there were no large masses of refugees fleeing across borders into neighboring countries, and the coalition took great care to protect the lives of innocent civilians as well as the important holy sites.

These accomplishments have provided a strong foundation on which to build the peace. Unlike Europe after World War II, for the most part the people of Iraq do not have to rebuild from war, even as they work to rebuild their country and society after decades of dictatorship.

There are still difficulties in Iraq, to be sure -- crime, inflation, gas lines, unemployment. But the fact that such difficulties exist should come as no surprise: No nation that has made the transition from tyranny to a free society has been immune to the difficulties and challenges of taking that path -- not even our own.

The years after our war of independence involved a good deal of chaos and confusion. There were uprisings such as Shays' Rebellion, with mobs attacking courthouses and government buildings. There was rampant inflation caused by the lack of a stable currency and the issue of competing paper monies by the various states. There were regional tensions between mercantile New England and the agrarian South. There was looting and crime and a lack of an organized police force. There were supporters of the former regime whose fate had to be determined. Our first effort at a governing charter -- the Articles of Confederation -- failed miserably, and it took eight years of contentious debate before we finally adopted our Constitution and inaugurated our first president. And, unlike the people of Iraq, we did not face the added challenge of recovering from the trauma of decades of brutal rule by a dictator like Saddam Hussein.

The point is this: It is now just seven weeks since Iraq's liberation -- and the challenges are there. As Thomas Jefferson put it, "we are not to expect to be translated from despotism to liberty in a featherbed." It took time and patience, but eventually our Founders got it right - and we hope so will the people of Iraq, over time.

We have a stake in their success. For if Iraq -- with its size, capabilities, and resources -- is able to move to the path of representative democracy, the impact in the region and the world could be dramatic. Iraq could conceivably become a model -- proof that a moderate Muslim state can succeed in the battle against extremism taking place in the Muslim world today.

We are committed to helping the Iraqi people get on that path to a free society. We do not have an American "template" we want to impose: Iraqis will figure out how to build a free nation in a manner that reflects their unique culture and traditions.

What President Bush has outlined are some broad principles that are critical if Iraq's transition from tyranny is to succeed: that Iraq be a single country, which does not support terrorists, threaten its neighbors or the world with weapons of mass destruction, or threaten its diverse population with terror and repression; that it have a government that respects and protects minorities, provides opportunities for its people through a market economy, and justice through an independent judiciary and rule of law.

These are core principles that undergird the world's diverse community of free nations. The coalition will seek out Iraqis who support these principles, and who desire to have a role in their country's future. Those who oppose these principles -- whose agenda is to replace Saddam Hussein's tyranny with some other form of dictatorship -- will be opposed.

As we move forward to help Iraqis build a free society, here are some of the guidelines our coalition is following:

- *Assert authority. Our goal is to put functional and political authority in the hands of Iraqis as soon as possible. The Coalition Provisional Authority has the responsibility to fill the vacuum of power in a country that has been a dictatorship for decades, by asserting authority over the country. It will do so. It will not tolerate self-appointed "leaders."

- *Provide security. Among the immediate objectives are restoration of law and order for the Iraqi people and provision of essential services. The coalition is hiring and training Iraqi police, and will be prepared to use force to impose order as required -- because without order, little else will be possible.

- *Commitment to stay; commitment to leave. The coalition will maintain as many security forces in Iraq as necessary, for as long as necessary, to accomplish the stated goals -- and no longer. Already 39 nations have offered stabilization forces or other needed assistance for the postwar effort, and that number is growing. Together, coalition countries will seek to provide a secure environment, so that over time Iraqis will be able to take charge of their country.

- *Improve conditions; involve Iraqis. The coalition is working energetically to improve the circumstances of the Iraqi people. Already, electric services in the north and south are better than they have been in 12 years and the power situation in Baghdad is improving, albeit slowly. The coalition is working to achieve rapid and visible accomplishments in other vital public services. The coalition will work to engage the Iraqi people as rapidly as possible, and give Iraqis leadership roles in the reconstruction effort -- for it is their responsibility to build the future of their country.

- *Promote Iraqis who share the goals of a free and moderate Iraq. In staffing ministries and positioning Iraqis in ways that will increase their influence, the coalition will work to have supportive Iraqis involved as early as possible -- so that Iraqi voices can explain the goals and direction to the Iraqi people. Only if Iraqis are engaged in, and responsible for, explaining to and leading their fellow citizens will broad public support develop that is essential for security.

- *De-Baathification. The coalition will work with forward-looking Iraqis and actively oppose the old regime's enforcers -- the Baath Party leaders, Fedayeen Saddam, and other

instruments of repression -- and make clear that it will eliminate the remnants of Saddam's regime.

*Justice for criminals. Those who committed war crimes or crimes against humanity will be tracked down and brought to justice. Mechanisms will be established to detain and screen out members of organizations that carried out the regime's repression and bring them to justice. De-Baathification may cause some inefficiencies, but it is critical to removing pervasive fear from Iraqi society.

*Repairing the social fabric. Iraq will need to find ways to heal the wounds the Baathists inflicted on the society. The experiences of Eastern Europe and other countries could inform this process.

*Property claims. Mechanisms will be established to adjudicate property claims peacefully.

*Favor market economy. Decisions will favor market systems, not Stalinist command systems, and activities that will begin to diversify the Iraqi economy beyond oil. The coalition will encourage moves to privatize state-owned enterprises.

*Oil. The Coalition Provisional Authority will develop a plan for the Iraqi oil industry based on transparency. Iraq's oil wealth will be used and marketed for the benefit of the Iraqi people.

*Contracts -- promoting Iraq's recovery. Whenever possible, contracts for work in Iraq will go to those who will use Iraqi workers and to countries that supported the Iraqi people's liberation, so as to contribute to greater regional economic activity and to accelerate Iraq's and the region's economic recovery.

*The international community. Other countries and international organizations, including the United Nations and non-governmental organizations, will be welcomed to assist in Iraq. They can play an important role. The Coalition Provisional Authority will work with them to maintain a focus of effort.

*Iraq's neighbors: assistance, but not interference. Assistance from Iraq's neighbors will be welcomed. Conversely, interference in Iraq by its neighbors or their proxies -- including those whose objective is to remake Iraq in Iran's image -- will not be accepted or permitted.

*Priority sources of funds. In assisting the Iraqi people, the U.S. will play its role but should not be considered the funder of first and last resort. The American people have already made a significant investment to liberate Iraq, and stand ready to contribute to rebuilding efforts. But when funds are needed, before turning to the U.S. taxpayers, the coalition will turn first to Iraqi regime funds located in Iraq; Iraqi funds in the U.N. Oil-for-Food program; seized frozen Iraqi regime assets in the U.S. and other countries; and international donors from across the globe, many of whom are already assisting.

*Trial and error. The transition to democracy will take time and may not always be a smooth road. In Central and Eastern Europe, the process has taken time, but it is succeeding. Trial and error and experimentation will be part of the process. It will not be perfect. Course corrections will be necessary and should be expected. This effort will require patience by all involved if it is to succeed.

*Patience and respect for Iraq's singular character. The ultimate political outcome must be decided by the Iraqi people, within the broad principles of the rule of law, minority rights,

individual liberty, and representative democracy. One ought not expect the Iraqi outcome to replicate any other system.

Iraqis have an historic opportunity to build a free and civil society. The road ahead will be difficult, but the coalition is committed to helping them succeed. As Iraqis take hold of their country, develop the institutions of self-government, and reclaim their place as responsible members of the international community, the world will have a new model for a successful transition from tyranny to self-reliance -- and a new ally in the global war on terror and the struggle for freedom and moderation in the Muslim world.

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